

Live in Tri-Cities? Here's how many wind turbines you might soon see from your house

BY ANNETTE CARY

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KENNEWICK, WA

“Too many turbines, too close to people” say three Kennewick area residents who crunched the numbers for the proposed [Horse Heaven Clean Energy Center](#).

[Scout Clean Energy](#) proposes two scenarios along the Horse Heaven Hills just south of Kennewick from Finley to Benton City:

- Up to 244 turbines up to 500 feet tall
- Up to 150 turbines up to 670 feet high.

“Benton County people are impacted disproportionately to every other county in the state, in the Northwest and even several states beyond,” by wind turbine projects, said Paul Krupin of Kennewick a scientist and attorney who worked on environmental issues for the federal government for three decades.

He and Tri-Cities CARES members Dave Sharp of Kennewick, a retired manager of Wyoming wind farms, and Pam Minelli, a Tri-Cities area homeowner, have been poring over the [Horse Heaven project's draft environmental impact statement](#) to better understand the proposed project and submit public comments on it by the end of the month.

The state Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council will decide whether to recommend the project to Gov. Jay Inslee, who will make the final decision. The nonprofit [Tri-Cities CARES](#), or Community Action for Responsible Environmental Stewardship, was formed to help protect the Horse Heaven Hills habitat and the natural landscape of the Tri-Cities area.

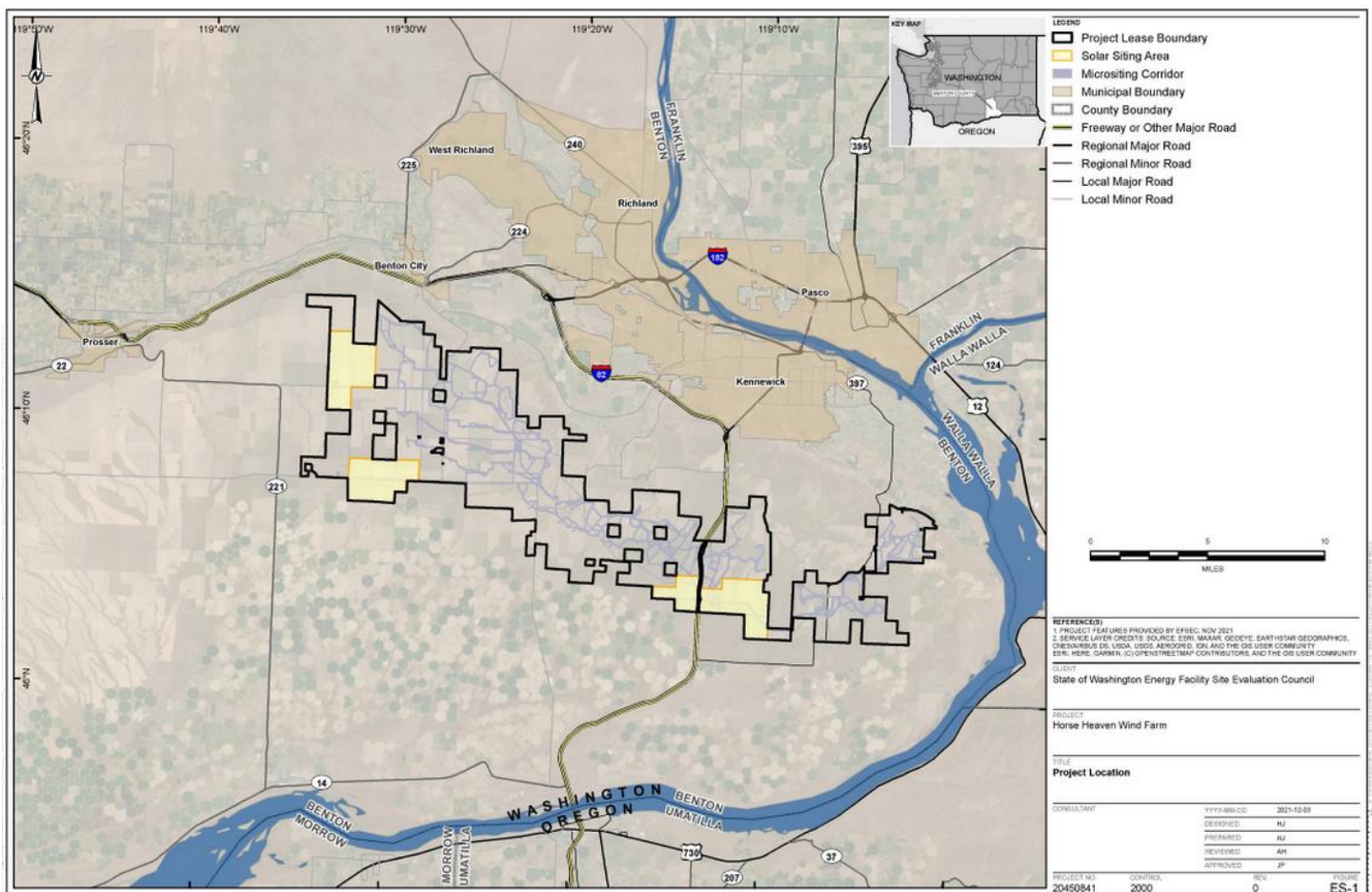


This view from above South Clodfelter Road looks northeast from a proposed Horse Heaven wind turbine site to houses in the Tripple Vista, Summit View, Badger Mountain South and Rancho Reata developments. Courtesy Bruce Bjornstad

The three found the draft study lacking, including a failure to analyze the proposed wind project’s impact on the people who would live near it, they said. They say an analysis shows that the turbines will be visible, including their blinking red lights at night, from many areas of Kennewick, Richland and Pasco.

For instance, more than 100 turbines will be visible from downtown Richland, they say. The view for residents of the Tripple Vista neighborhood between Badger and Clodfelter roads would include 137 to 199 wind turbines during the day and the blinking lights of 148 to 107 turbines at night, according to data the group pulled from the environmental impact statements’ visual impact assessment.

The blinking lights are set at the top of the turbine hub, with the blades stretching higher into the sky to be seen during the day. In Franklin County, along the Columbia riverfront the turbines will be visible from the Interstate 82 bridge downriver almost as far as the blue bridge, according to the group’s analysis. Even more would be seen at higher elevations in Pasco, although they would be distant.



The boundary of the proposed Horse Heaven Clean Energy Center south of the Tri-Cities is shown. Solar arrays could be in the yellow areas of the map. Environmental Facility Site Evaluation Council

At the top of Webber Canyon, the turbines “will stretch from one horizon to the other,” Krupin said. The main I-82 entrance to Kennewick would be flanked by towering turbines, he said.

TRI-CITIES TURBINES VS. WASHINGTON

“You cannot imagine how big this project is until you get down on the ground and see it,” Krupin said. “It is huge.”

The project will cover 110 square miles, with 105 miles of roads crossing arroyos and other non-agriculture land, Sharp said. Between the Horse Heaven wind farm and the nearby and smaller Nine Canyon wind farm, just over 100,000 residents of Benton County will live within six miles of a turbine, according to the group’s computer analysis that relies on U.S. Census tract data.

That's five times more than the estimated 20,000 people who live within six miles of a wind farm across the rest of Washington state, they said. Other Washington state counties with wind farms average about 2,000 people living within six miles, according to the group.

"You just don't develop them in a metropolitan area. They are out in a rural area," Sharp said. And the number of people living near the turbines, should the project go forward as proposed, would increase in time, they said.



This panoramic view looks northeast off Badger Canyon Road shows Badger Mountain, Benton City and towards West Richland through the saddle of Badger and Candy Mountains, at right. Courtesy Bruce Bjornstad

The Nine Canyon project started with about 17,500 residents within six miles in 2000, but due to project expansions and population growth now has about 59,000 people within six miles, they said.

The group picked six miles to analyze as the distance before wind turbines are far enough away to blend into the landscape.

Minelli says her home between I-82 and East Badger Road now has a 180-degree view of countryside, with hawks soaring outside her deck.

"We live there because we like the tranquility of the rural views, the rural sounds," she said. But now she and thousands of others face the industrialization of their rural views, she said. "These projects need to be put in a rural area that doesn't change the lifestyle and the ability of us to enjoy our homes," she said.

FEWER WIND TURBINES POSSIBLE?

Krupin, Sharp and Minelli are calling for Scout Clean Energy to reduce the number of turbines it expects to be most visible to people living in Benton County, which include those in the Horse Heaven Hills wildlife corridor.

[Washington State Fish and Wildlife Department](#) has recommended that wind infrastructure be no closer than a half mile from a wildlife corridor, according to the group.

Although the group found the draft environmental impact statement short on specifics, they think that the number of proposed turbines could be reduced and Scout could still meet its generation goals.

They have been sharing their analysis with local government and other community leaders, but Scout Clean Energy has not seen it. Dave Kobus, senior project manager for the Horse Heaven project, said the process of determining project viability is complicated and requires access to proprietary data, complicated financial modeling and confidential manufacturer data not publicly available.



This view shows the Dennis Road possible wind turbine tower location east of Weber Canyon looking northwest towards Benton City. Courtesy Bruce Bjornstad

He said that the Washington state Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council, or EFSEC, has “run a rigorous, independent analysis spanning nearly two years and is suggesting mitigation measure that go well beyond established precedent in several areas.”

Among mitigation measures suggested in the draft environmental impact statement are requiring turbines to be more than a half mile from residents whose land is not part of the project and steps to prevent or minimize the flickering shadows that could be cast on homes by rotating blades. Measures also are suggested to help protect wildlife.

“We are fully committed to working through the adjudication process and closely reviewing the draft EFSEC document as well as any public comments provided to EFSEC to assure mitigation is appropriate,” Kobus said. “The commercial aspects of the technology selection and placement will continue to be reviewed as we progress through the EFSEC process deliberation,” he said.

The proposed project includes solar panels and battery storage in addition to wind turbines.

COMMENT ON HORSE HEAVEN PROJECT

Public comments on the draft environmental impact statement, or EIS, should be received by EFSEC no later than Feb. 1, according to a recent clarification to the deadline by the state.

Comments may be submitted online at www.comments.efsec.wa.gov. There also is a link there to submit comments for Horse Heaven adjudication, which is a legal proceeding. Comments on the draft Horse Heaven EIS also may be mailed to Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council, 621 Woodland Square Loop SE, Lacey, WA 98504-3172.

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